

CORRESPONDENCE

Policy of the Society

An open letter to the President and Members of the Eugenics Society's Council

MAY I refer to last year's Report, where, under the heading "The Aims and Objects of the Eugenics Society," it is stated that: "Eugenics aims at improving the inborn qualities of future generations"?

What have you as directors of the *Society's* policy done to improve the inborn qualities of future generations? I have been a Fellow for many years and do not remember to have seen in the REVIEW mention of any act definitely likely to lead to this object. The work of the *Society*, as shown in the REVIEW, has been directed to a study of the inheritance of undesirable qualities and to their elimination by preventing their appearance. As everyone knows the practice of contraception has been followed chiefly by the more intelligent and capable people, so that its advocacy, by you and others, has had a distinctly dysgenic effect. Has the British people as a whole improved as regards its inborn qualities as a result of the *Society's* work? Is it not, rather, a fact that the deterioration of the stock has become so obvious that it has caused grave concern among social workers? Is it not a fact, too, that while jails are empty—presumably through the influence of better education and better conditions of life—institutions are crowded with mental defectives? Was it not shown by the 1929 Mental Deficiency Committee that the incidence of mental deficiency had risen considerably during the previous quarter-century, and by Dr. Cattell in our own journal, a little while ago, that the general average of intelligence has declined?*

I suggest that all this shows that the policy so far followed by the Council has not resulted in any improvement in "the inborn qualities" of the race, that it has in fact failed in its object. Would it not be wise therefore to reconsider your policy and adopt some more hopeful lines?

What these might be is not far to seek.

If Havelock Ellis's findings (*A Study of British Genius*, p. 102†), about the position in the family of children of outstanding ability are assumed to be applicable to ability in general, we see at once that (apart from its differential use among different strains) birth control is in itself dysgenic, for by cutting off the youngest member of a family it cuts off also what are, next to the eldest, the most promising. On an earlier page (97) Havelock Ellis

shows that men of outstanding ability come from the largest families. Let me quote his words: "It will be seen that in genius-producing families there is an invariable deficiency of families below average normal size, and a gradually increasing excess of families above that size." It would appear then that a strenuous advocacy of large families rather than small is likely to lead to an increase in the production of very able men and women; and since it has been shown that families are now mostly too small to maintain the population level (let alone fill the Dominions) such advocacy could safely be followed without any fear of over-population being the result. May I remind you that to see an error of policy and reverse it has ever been considered among the highest manifestations of statesmanship.

Again reading a little further in the Report I find that eugenics seeks in practice to realize the aims of positive eugenics by "promoting the fertility of superior and useful stocks." What have you done in this direction? Have you initiated, have you ever supported publicly, any legislation designed to further this aim? Every year the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposes in Parliament measures to help the less rich. Have you urged him rather to help the parents of "superior and useful stocks"? Here is a second possible line of work in the direction of "improving the inborn qualities of future generations."

Later on we read that the *Society* "seeks to awaken a eugenic or racial conscience which will influence: (1) The individual in the choice of mate and in the decisions as to parenthood, and (2) The community so as to bring to bear on issues of eugenic importance the forces of scientifically informed public opinion."

What have you done in the latter direction? The late J. D. Unwin has shown conclusively in his book *Sex and Culture** that it has always been through continence that societies have progressed, and through sexual laxity that they have degenerated. Here it seems to me is a discovery of first-class importance. It might be said to be the only well-authenticated fact of positive (as distinct from negative) eugenics. Let me quote two passages from the book.

"If men and women are sexually free, their sexual desires will receive direct satisfaction; but if the sexual opportunity is limited, the impulses must be checked . . . but usually the tension produced by emotional conflicts is exhibited in some form of mental and social energy, the intensity of that energy depending upon the intensity of the compulsory continence. When the sexual opportunity of a society is reduced almost to a minimum, the resulting social energy produces 'great accomplishments in human endeavour'.

* "Is National Intelligence Declining?" *EUGENICS REVIEW*, 1936, 28, 181; "Some Further Relations Between Intelligence, Fertility and Socio-Economic Factors," *EUGENICS REVIEW*, 1937, 29, 171.

† Constable & Co. Ltd., 1927.

* See *EUGENICS REVIEW*, 1935, 27, 56.

and 'civilization.' . . . Such is the general conclusion which must be drawn from the psychological evidence."

"If . . . a vigorous society wishes to display its productive energy for a long time, and even for ever, it must re-create itself . . . by altering its economic and social organization in such a way as to render it both possible and tolerable for sexual opportunity to remain at a minimum. . . . In such a case the face of the society would be set in the Direction of the Cultural Process; its inherited tradition would be continually enriched; it would achieve a higher culture than has yet been attained; . . . its tradition would be augmented and refined in a manner which surpasses our present understanding."

Is there any clearer indication of the road along which the nation must travel if it is to progress in culture? Those who accept with Unwin the psychological evidence will find in it sufficient explanation of the facts which he has produced; those who prefer a mechanical explanation may perhaps find it in that submitted by me in a letter to the REVIEW of April 1936 (p. 85) and in Mr. Brewer's letter of April 1937 (p. 81).

No one who does not shut his eyes to facts can doubt that to-day we English have entered a critical period of our history. Everywhere are forces tending to undermine self-control. There is abroad a belief that psychology teaches that repression is always bad, and self-realization therefore the ideal. Under its influence married men and women apparently think it no shame to appear as defendants in a divorce suit, and the newspapers of largest circulation report marital infidelities as if they mattered not at all. But Unwin's researches show that there can be only one end to this—a national decline.

For centuries the religious bodies have set their faces against the loosening of the marriage tie, but to-day they fight with hands tied behind the back, for the authority on which they relied for their (it is now clear well-founded) intuition is no longer believed in, and a shallow modern psychology has seemed to prove that intuition false. But here is scientific evidence that it was not. Clear as a bell in Unwin's book sounds his stern warning: the road to national decay is by moral laxity. But equally clear is the promise that through sexual restraint a society will progress. And as if to add force to his conclusion that the restraints of religion make for increased social energy, which in a society capable of it always manifests itself in an "expansive social energy" followed by a "productive" one (p. 316), we are being reminded at the bicentenary of Wesley's conversion that he "changed the course of history," for the great expansion of the British race over the world and of its productive energy followed the revival of religion brought about by Wesley's preaching.

Here then is indicated a third line of approach to the declared objects of the *Society*, and one by which history shows we may almost certainly reach it. Is it not then our duty as a *Society* ostensibly devoted to the furtherance of the future national

well-being to make Unwin's conclusions known? Could the wealth and influence of the *Society* be better used than in helping all agencies which make for sobriety and restraint and in their various ways are fighting these degenerating influences?

In particular I suggest that by enlisting the aid of religious bodies (of every denomination) it might be possible to give to every recently or, as time goes on, every newly married couple the opportunity of knowing that through self-control their own nervous energy may be sublimated and children of higher quality be born. If it is objected that sensible people do exercise self-control and need not be told of its value, I would say "Yes, without doubt many do, but also without doubt many even of them occasionally do not, the widespread idea that repression is harmful being only too easy to follow." But most parents can readily be moved by considerations of their children's welfare, and if they knew what Unwin has shown numbers of them would be induced so to order their mutual relations that, as he put it, the national tradition would be augmented and refined in a manner which would surpass our understanding.

These three lines of work are each of definite promise for the improvement of the inborn qualities of our people—the declared object of the *Society*. The policy so far followed of merely trying to prevent the birth of possible carriers of hereditary taints must, it seems to me, lead eventually to the virtual extinction of the nation or its suppression by a more numerous one. It is a policy of defeatism, and defeatism never won a cause yet.

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. The measures taken by the Council to fulfil the Aims and Objects of the *Society* are described in the Annual Report quoted in the above letter. The *Society* prefers to base its policy on positive information, e.g. on the data collected by the Population Investigation Committee and by the Population Policies Committee, rather than on speculations, even when these are as interesting as those of the late Mr. Unwin.

A Scheme of Practical Eugenics

To the Editor, *Eugenics Review*

SIR,—In the EUGENICS REVIEW of April 1931 (p. 15) there appeared an article by Monsieur Alfred Dachert entitled "Positive Eugenics in Practice." This article gave an account of Les Jardins Ungemach, a garden city on the outskirts of Strasbourg, where positive eugenic principles were being put into practice.* I had been very desirous of seeing M. Dachert's garden city and some time ago had an opportunity of doing so. M. Dachert received me very cordially as a member of the *Eugenics Society* and showed me his scheme in operation. This scheme is so original in its con-

* Further references appeared in the issues of July 1933, pp. 91 and 105, and October 1935, p. 230.